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Submitted by Chet Cooper for WH
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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Office of Current Intelligence
25 January 1963

CURRENT INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: The South Korean Crisis

1. The crisis in the South Korean regime centers on control of the government political party which is now being organized. Through this party the present rulers expect to control the government scheduled to come into being after elections this spring.

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2. From the beginning of the military regime in May 1961, Kim Chong-pil has been a major figure.

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Kim has up to now been generally successful in eliminating or reducing the effectiveness of opposing factions in the junta. The influence of civilian political leaders was limited by barring them from political activity.

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3. General Pak's pledge in August 1961 to return the government to civilian control raised the problem of the future role of the military rulers. It soon became apparent that the top junta figures intended to continue in power and that their main concern was in developing the mechanism for achieving this goal.

4. The regime decided to develop a political party as its vehicle for perpetuating its control. Kim Chong-pil became the prime mover in developing a country-wide organization.

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[REDACTED] When the ban on political activity was raised on 1 January that organization was ready to be brought to the surface.

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5. In Kim's design General Pak was slated to become party president, with Kim in the apparently dominant position of party chairman. Kim resigned as head of CIA on 7 January to devote full time to party activities.

6. Kim's opponents in the junta quickly realized that he had designed an organization that would enable him to dominate both the party and the government. Party influence would be direct and decisive on the strong executive power which has been provided by the revised constitution. They were also aware of the possibility that they might be at Kim's mercy if they chose to become candidates for election to the new legislative assembly.

7. The two major junta factions--Kim's young colonels and the senior officers--are now involved in a struggle for control of the government party. The generals precipitated the present crisis because they believed Kim's power over the party had to be restricted in the early phases of organization. They believed they would be eliminated once he was entrenched in power.

8. Marine Lt. Gen. (retired) Kim Tong-ha led off the opposition move against Kim Chong-pil by resigning from the Supreme Council for National Reconstruction on 21 January. Other senior officers in the top junta council threatened to resign and thus break regime unity. Since the opposing factions have ties with the armed forces, the break in the junta posed the threat that military forces might be used in a struggle for power.

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9. General Pak, while heavily dependent on Kim Chong-pil, has endeavored to hold himself above

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the factions. A significant amount of his authority has stemmed from his ability to maintain a semblance of unity in the junta by balancing the factions and compromising their differences. Pak has been aware that a breakup of the regime might lead to disturbances and a resort to force by the contending factions.

10. His decision to remove Kim Chong-pil as chief organizer of the government party was almost certainly influenced by his estimate of the extent of the support Kim's opponents had in the armed forces. Kim has submitted his resignation and is scheduled to go abroad in the near future.

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11. Pak has decided to take an active political role apparently in an effort to remove the party leadership post from factional contention. At the same time he probably desires to have firm control over a political machine which could be used to maintain his power during and after the transition.

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12. While Kim's removal would ease the immediate crisis in the regime, factional conflicts are likely to continue to threaten internal stability. The military regime has failed to win popular support and would be unlikely to win a popular mandate in a climate of free political activity. The military forces will remain the key factor in the Korean political situation for some time to come and power seekers will almost certainly have to obtain backing among the armed forces. General Pak has emphasized this in the present situation by ordering the Army chief of staff to put army forces on a precautionary alert against possible disturbances.

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